
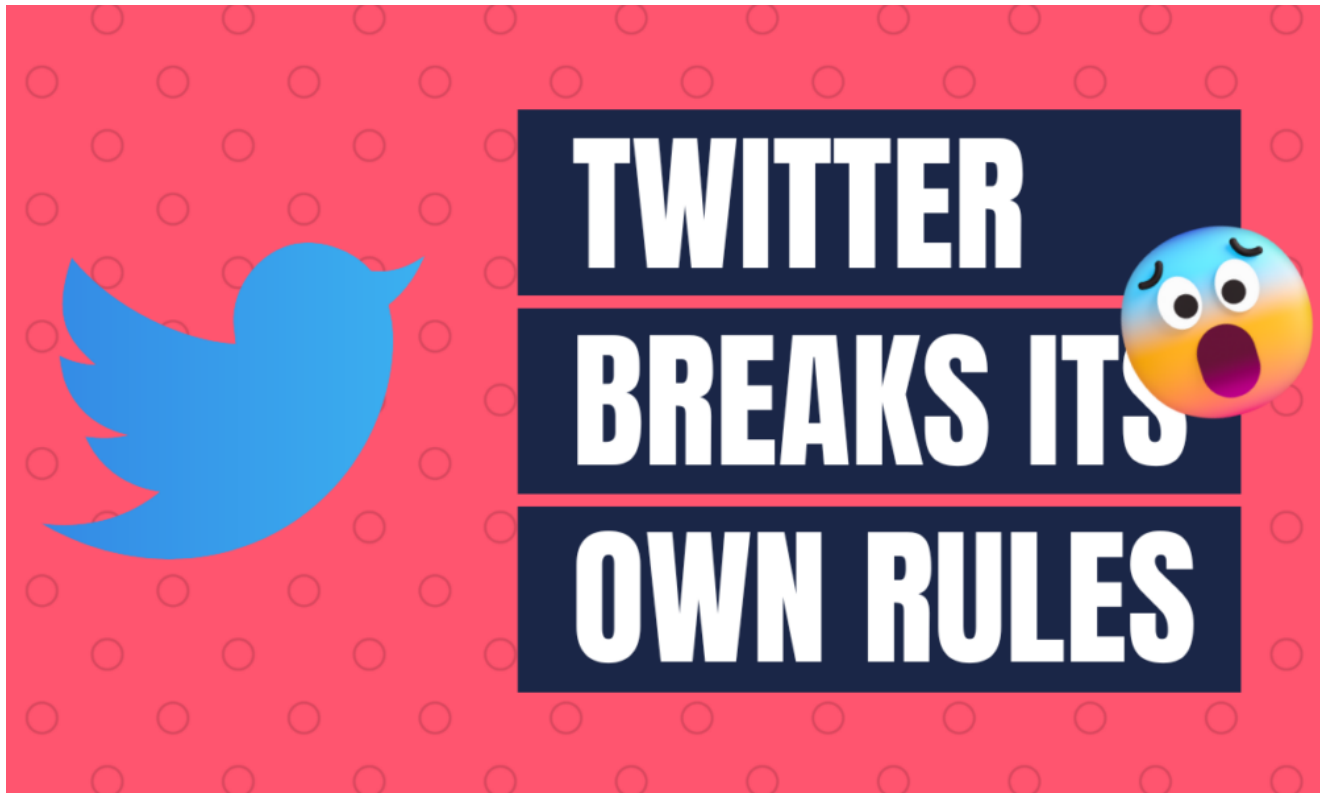


Rules changes at Twitter

 cnav.news/2022/12/11/accountability/news-media/rules-changes-twitter/

By Terry A. Hurlbut

December 11, 2022



In Part Two of the Twitter Files sub-sequence, The Suspension of Donald Trump, Michael Shellenberger discusses Twitter’s rules change. Twitter *had to* change its rules to excuse (it could never justify) suspending or banning the Donald Trump account. When they did that, Twitter management compromised Twitter’s value as a historical archive. Only Elon Musk’s reinstatement of the Trump account and other accounts has repaired this fault. Furthermore, when rules can change on the fly, justice is no longer an issue of rules, but one of personalities. This is the real meaning of the legal phrase “arbitrary and capricious.” That one fact made Twitter the “crime scene” Elon Musk called it yesterday.

Twitter is both a social media company and a crime scene

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [December 10, 2022](#)

How the rules changed

In 2018, doubtless in response to the Trump Derangement Syndrome that plagued Twitter even then, the Twitter Policy Team dropped this thread:

There's been a lot of discussion about political figures and world leaders on Twitter, and we want to share our stance.

— Twitter Public Policy (@Policy) [January 5, 2018](#)

Blocking a world leader from Twitter or removing their controversial Tweets would hide important information people should be able to see and debate. It would also not silence that leader, but it would certainly hamper necessary discussion around their words and actions.

— Twitter Public Policy (@Policy) [January 5, 2018](#)

We are working to make Twitter the best place to see and freely discuss everything that matters. We believe that's the best way to help our society make progress.

— Twitter Public Policy (@Policy) [January 5, 2018](#)

This offended some of Twitter's most "Trump deranged" accountholders, one of whom articulated one of the earliest Cancel Culture rationales. Almost five years later, someone has observed, correctly, that Twitter changed for the worse after the Trump suspension.

Right. Twitter died right after he was kicked off.

— Rajeev Bishnoi (@svarncapital) [December 10, 2022](#)

Bear this thread in mind when digesting Michael Shellenberger's thread, which we can call The Twitter Files, Part Four. This began to drop at 3:28 p.m. PST.

On Jan 7, senior Twitter execs:

- create justifications to ban Trump
- seek a change of policy for Trump alone, distinct from other political leaders
- express no concern for the free speech or democracy implications of a ban

This [#TwitterFiles](#) is reported with [@lwoodhouse](#)

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 10, 2022](#)

Part 2, where [@bariweiss](#) shows how senior Twitter execs created secret blacklists to "de-amplify" disfavored Twitter users, not just specific tweets; <https://t.co/ilWqjXitxq>

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 10, 2022](#)

For years, Twitter had resisted calls to ban Trump.

“Blocking a world leader from Twitter,” it wrote in 2018, “would hide important info... [and] hamper necessary discussion around their words and actions.”<https://t.co/qaqkIHOHjc>

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 10, 2022](#)

Dorsey was on vacation in French Polynesia the week of January 4-8, 2021. He phoned into meetings but also delegated much of the handling of the situation to senior execs [@yoyoel](#), Twitter’s Global Head of Trust and Safety, and [@vijaya](#) Head of Legal, Policy, & Trust.

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 10, 2022](#)

In 2017, Roth tweeted that there were “ACTUAL NAZIS IN THE WHITE HOUSE.”

In April 2022, Roth told a colleague that his goal “is to drive change in the world,” which is why he decided not to become an academic. <pic.twitter.com/1Bi7fNHfWP>

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 10, 2022](#)

Around 11:30 am PT, Roth DMs his colleagues with news that he is excited to share.

“GUESS WHAT,” he writes. “Jack just approved repeat offender for civic integrity.”

The new approach would create a system where five violations (“strikes”) would result in permanent suspension. <pic.twitter.com/F1KYqd1Xea>

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

The colleague wants to know if the decision means Trump can finally be banned. The person asks, “does the incitement to violence aspect change that calculus?”

Roth says it doesn't. “Trump continues to just have his one strike” (remaining). <pic.twitter.com/Qyi1sJNa0w>

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

On J8, Twitter says its ban is based on “specifically how [Trump's tweets] are being received & interpreted.”

But in 2019, Twitter said it did “not attempt to determine all potential interpretations of the content or its intent.” <https://t.co/2jW1s5pH4W> <pic.twitter.com/8gZwIDtyUQ>

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

"This might be an unpopular opinion but one off ad hoc decisions like this that don't appear rooted in policy are imho a slippery slope... This now appears to be a fiat by an online platform CEO with a global presence that can gatekeep speech for the entire world..." pic.twitter.com/4pedmgY8pa

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

Recall from [#TwitterFiles2](#) by [@bariweiss](#) that, according to Twitter staff, "We control visibility quite a bit. And we control the amplification of your content quite a bit. And normal people do not know how much we do." <https://t.co/rDs5VZdaCt>

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

Roth immediately DMs a colleague to ask that they add "stopthesteal" & [QAnon conspiracy term] "kraken" to a blacklist of terms to be deamplified.

Roth's colleague objects that blacklisting "stopthesteal" risks "deamplifying counterspeech" that validates the election. pic.twitter.com/G02gGeicUW

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

But it turns out that even blacklisting "kraken" is less straightforward than they thought. That's because kraken, in addition to being a QAnon conspiracy theory based on the mythical Norwegian sea monster, is also the name of a cryptocurrency exchange, and was thus "allowlisted" pic.twitter.com/KGnPJUGHY5

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

What if a user dislikes Trump *and* objects to Twitter's censorship? The tweet still gets deleted. But since the *intention* is not to deny the election result, no punishing strike is applied.

"if there are instances where the intent is unclear please feel free to raise" pic.twitter.com/8bdG6b38ej

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

What happens next is essential to understanding how Twitter justified banning Trump.

Sales exec: "are we dropping the public interest [policy] now..."

Roth, six hours later: "In this specific case, we're changing our public interest approach for his account..." pic.twitter.com/XRUFil2npI

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

Roth pushes for a permanent suspension of Rep. Matt Gaetz even though it “doesn’t quite fit anywhere (duh)”

It’s a kind of test case for the rationale for banning Trump.

“I’m trying to talk [Twitter’s] safety [team] into... removal as a conspiracy that incites violence.” pic.twitter.com/ZQP6u1zevy

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

That evening, a Twitter engineer DMs to Roth to say, "I feel a lot of debates around exceptions stem from the fact that Trump’s account is not technically different from anybody else’ and yet treated differently due to his personal status, without corresponding _Twitter rules_.." pic.twitter.com/R04TlfdVvK

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

The evening of January 7, the same junior employee who expressed an "unpopular opinion" about "ad hoc decisions... that don’t appear rooted in policy," speaks up one last time before the end of the day.<https://t.co/DKyQmDhQvB>

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

The employee notes, later in the day, "And Will Oremus noticed the inconsistency too...", linking to an article for OneZero at Medium called, "Facebook Chucked Its Own Rulebook to Ban Trump."<https://t.co/JmafTfbUqV>

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

"... and places the responsibility for that power on their own shoulders... So they hide behind an ever-changing rulebook, alternately pointing to it when it’s convenient and shoving it under the nearest rug when it isn’t."<https://t.co/JmafTeURoV>

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

“Facebook’s suspension of Trump now puts Twitter in an awkward position. If Trump does indeed return to Twitter, the pressure on Twitter will ramp up to find a pretext on which to ban him as well.”

Indeed. And as [@bariweiss](#) will show tomorrow, that’s exactly what happened.

/END

— Michael Shellenberger (@ShellenbergerMD) [December 11, 2022](#)

Reaction and analysis

As Mr. Shellenberger was posting the thread, outraged users weighed in immediately. One said of the “junior member” who warned of the implications, “Give that man a promotion!”

Hope he's still employed there. If so, give that man a promotion!

— magaCat (@Cat932168591) [December 11, 2022](#)

Many other users seconded that recommendation. Another observed that at least one person understood the meaning of the United States Constitution.

Someone in the place did know about the Constitution it seems. Too bad no one cared.

— Lavern Spicer 🇺🇸 (@lavern_spicer) [December 11, 2022](#)

This attorney for the Center for American Liberty left several tweets in outraged reaction at various points in the thread. He closed with this:

Thank you, [@ShellenbergerMD](#) for your reporting.

Our team [@Liberty_Ctr](#) is standing up to Big Tech's collusion with the government to silence speech protected by the First Amendment.

You can learn more about our work here: <https://t.co/vU5j15cbsn>

— Eric Sell (@EricSell) [December 11, 2022](#)

To be sure, a few users held forth that Trump incited the January 6 “riots,” he was a dangerous man, etc., etc. But most did not.

This thread, even more than the earlier one, shows that Twitter deliberately changed its own rules. We see here an organization changing rules hour by hour. Matt Taibbi [hinted two days ago](#) that the final result was a discarding of rules – and rule by executive fiat.

To those who insist that “it’s a private company”: first, that’s not true. Twitter became a [State actor](#), and we know who gave Twitter its marching orders. Second, any platform ruling by fiat is no less tyrannical than is a civil authoritarian. To paraphrase Thomas Jefferson: a chief moderator whose character is thus marked by every act that might define a tyrant, does not deserve the business or custom of free users.